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Brzezinski first defends, then regrets exploiting Billy Carter link to Libya

By Curt Matthews
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski defended yesterday his use of Billy Carter in trying to gain Libyan support in the early days of the Iranian hostage crisis.

However, Mr. Brzezinski told the Senate subcommittee investigating Mr. Carter's ties with the Libyan government that in retrospect he should not have involved the president's younger brother in the Iranian crisis because it has caused too much controversy.

"The hostage situation was so unorthodox that it called for unusual approaches," Mr. Brzezinski told the subcommittee. "The thought was that we could use Billy Carter because the Libyans knew him and had friendly relations with him."

Mr. Brzezinski said that the idea to use Mr. Carter as an ad hoc envoy to gain support for release of the 53 Americans taken hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran came from Rosalynn Carter shortly after the Americans were seized November 4.

Mr. Brzezinski said he called Billy Carter November 20 and sought his help. Mr. Carter came to Washington the same day and arranged a meeting November 27 with Ali el-Houdari, the secretary of the Libyan People's Bureau [the Libyan embassy] in Washington.

"The meeting was an attempt to get the Libyan government to say publicly what they were saying privately in diplomatic discussions," Mr. Brzezinski told the subcommittee.

He added that although there had been press support of the Iranian seizure of hostages before November 20, two days after the meeting with Mr. Houdari the official position of the Libyan government called for release of the hostages.

Senator Dennis DeConcini (D, Ariz.) asked why Mr. Brzezinski himself had not arranged the meeting with Mr. Houdari and not involved the president's brother. Mr. Brzezinski said, "The issue was not one of making contact... it was to encourage a more friendly relationship with someone representing a country unfriendly to the U.S."

According to the national security adviser, he consulted with Secretary of State Cyrus R.



ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
testifies before Senate panel

Vance before asking for Billy Carter's help and was told, "Anything is worth a try."

Mr. Brzezinski said the strategy was to "isolate" Iran by gaining support in Libya, a country that had in the past supported revolutionary activities in the Middle East.

Regarding Mr. Carter's involvement in the hostage crisis, Mr. Brzezinski said he did not know whether the president's brother helped.

At one point during his testimony, Mr. Brzezinski came under bitter attack from Senator Strom Thurmond (R, S.C.) who suggested that rather than concerning himself with national security matters, Mr. Brzezinski was "a political trouble shooter" trying to prevent Billy Carter's Libyan connections from becoming a problem for the president.

"I consider that to be a highly improper insinuation, and innuendo not justified by the facts," Mr. Brzezinski said in an angry retort. "I resent the allegation you're making regarding my motives."

Senator Thurmond replied, "We're after the truth, we're trying to get the truth and we're not sure you're telling it."

"You may not be sure, senator, but I am," Mr. Brzezinski said.

Mr. Brzezinski, the last scheduled public witness in the subcommittee's probe of Mr. Carter's ties with Libya, insisted that the president's brother had no influence on U.S. policy toward Libya. He also rejected the suggestion by Senator Thurmond that the White House decision to draw Billy Carter into the hostage crisis was intended to enhance his opportunity to profit from dealings with the Libyan government.

Mr. Brzezinski testified that when he learned from Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, that Billy Carter was trying to get an increased allocation of Libyan oil for a Jacksonville (Fla.) firm, he called Mr. Carter and admonished him not to exploit his relationship with the president.

Mr. Carter turned aside the admonition and, in effect, told Mr. Brzezinski to mind his own business, according to testimony by both men.

Although the public portion of the subcommittee's investigation has concluded, the subcommittee staff continues to sift information gathered in recent days, particularly a set of telephone logs that show a flurry of calls between Billy Carter and a number of U.S. and Libyan officials.

Investigators have focused especially on calls Mr. Carter made December 6 to the Charter Oil Company in Jacksonville and the Libyan embassy. On that date, President Carter met with the chief Libyan diplomat in the U.S.

Other records obtained by the subcommittee show that on the day Mr. Turner informed Mr. Brzezinski of Mr. Carter's ties with Charter Oil, a call was placed from Mr. Carter's office in the Best Western Motel in Americus, Ga., to Libya. Similar calls were made over the next several days, according to the logs.

The subcommittee has invited Mr. Carter to testify in executive session to clear up some portions of his previous public testimony and perhaps to explain the purpose of some of his telephone calls.

The final report of the committee is due early next month.